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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [KJUS](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: DISMISSAL OF TWO COLONELS AND LT COLONEL TIED TO
SOACHA EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLINGS

REF: A. BOGOTA 3625
[1](#)B. BOGOTA 3686
[1](#)C. BOGOTA 3744

Classified By: Political Counselor John S. Creamer. Reason: 1.4(b,d)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) On October 24, Army Commander General Mario Montoya removed two colonels and a lieutenant colonel from their commands due to their roles in the alleged extrajudicial killings of eleven men from Soacha. Montoya publicly said the three officers were removed due to "serious indications that they participated in acts that compromised the honor of the military." President Uribe called the actions an "embarrassment to the country" and demanded that those involved be severely punished. Montoya reiterated his commitment to the capture and demobilization policy, and stressed his efforts to ensure that human rights cases are investigated by the civilian judiciary rather than the military justice system. Sources told us the special Defense Ministry Commission investigating the Soacha cases has identified the recruiters, the killers, and the commanders involved. It will soon provide its findings to the Minister. Prosecutor General Mario Iguaran told us the Prosecutor General's Office (Fiscalia) investigation does not look good for the military. END SUMMARY.

ARMY COMMANDER DISMISSES THREE OFFICERS FOR CONNECTION TO
DEATHS

[1](#)2. (SBU) On October 24, Army Commander General Mario Montoya publicly removed from their commands two colonels and a lieutenant colonel for their roles in the disappearance and subsequent killings of young men from Soacha. The three are Col. Santiago Herrera Fajardo (the former chief of staff of the 15th Mobile Brigade and current chief of staff of 5th Division); Col. Ruben Dario Castro Gomez (current commander of the 15th Mobile Brigade); and Lt. Col. Gabriel Rincon Amado (current chief of staff of the 15th Mobile Brigade). Montoya publicly said the three officers were removed due to "serious indications that they participated in acts that compromised the honor of the military and proper military conduct and procedure." President Uribe called the actions of those involved an "embarrassment to the country" and supported the application of maximum sentences in the crimes. The three officers have denied any wrongdoing.

[1](#)3. (C) Montoya told us on October 22 that an internal army

investigation had given him doubts about the 15th Mobile Brigade's role in at least two of the Soacha cases. He would quickly remove the commanders involved, and would publicly link their removals to the Soacha killings despite the risk to due process. Montoya reiterated his commitment to the Defense Ministry's emphasis on captures and demobilizations over kills, and stressed his efforts--in the face of resistance from many of his colleagues--to ensure that all alleged human rights cases are investigated by the civilian judiciary rather than the military criminal justice system. He could not explain why some commanders appear to continue to promote body count, but conceded that in the "distant past" the Army had an order rewarding commanders for numbers of kills. Montoya noted his cooperation with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on extrajudicial killings, and said he would support the Fiscalía's criminal investigation of the Soacha cases.

14. (U) The Inspector General (Procuraduria) is also investigating the 15th Mobile Brigade for falsifying information regarding the deaths of the 11 Soacha men allegedly killed in combat by the military. Additionally, the Procuraduria is looking at failures in the forensic work, such as control of the corpse and handling of evidence, by the Fiscalía's Technical Investigative Corps (CTI) and the Medical Examiners' office. Retired Sergeant Alexander Rodriguez Sanchez, a former member of the 15th Mobile Brigade, has testified that Herrera gave "official approval" to the extrajudicial killings. Herrera has countered that Rodriguez is mentally unstable and had received 87 disciplinary sanctions by his commanders during his 14 years

of service. Herrera served as staff aide to General Montoya before being reassigned to the 5th Division due to Rodriguez' allegations.

DEFENSE MINISTRY COMMISSION FINDS EVIDENCE OF EXTRAJUDICIAL
KILLINGS

15. (C) A Ministry of Defense (MOD) source participating in a special commission set up by Defense Minister Santos and headed by Major General Suarez to investigate the Soacha killings told us the commission (Refs A and B) has identified the recruiters, the killers, the commanders involved, the modus operandi behind the murders, the victims' profiles and serious breakdowns in the forensic investigations. The Commission will soon provide its report to the Minister. Separately, National Prosecutor Mario Iguaran told us the Fiscalía's investigation of the Soacha cases is progressing quickly and does not look good for the military.
BROWNFIELD